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ABSTRACT

The LINGUA Project International Electronic Mail Tandem Network, sponsored by the European Union, is described in a series of chapter-articles. Universities in a number of European countries and several non-European countries have collaborated in expansion of the network, related research projects, and development of instructional materials to facilitate language learning in tandem using the Internet. The report describes: the network's structure and operation (partner institutions, bilingual subnets, future prospects), underlying instructional principles (learner autonomy, instructional forms, academic advising); techniques for integrating e-mail tandem learning into language courses, including such issues as curriculum design, facilities, accreditation, translation, and examples of integration into a writing skills course and an intercultural studies curriculum; use of electronic discussion forums in each subnet for language and intercultural learning, including posting types, discussion topics, and student and teacher participation; obtaining membership and establishing new subnets; use of subnets for language pairs; and examples of tandem partnerships. Lists of institutions and individuals currently participating in the project are appended. Contains 59 references. (MSE)

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ED 399 789

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Centre for Language and Communication Studies

A guide to language learning in tandem via the Internet

Edited by
David Little and Helmut Brammerts

CLCS Occasional Paper No.46

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(continued on inside back cover)

CLCS Occasional Paper No.46
Summer 1996

A guide to language learning in tandem via the Internet

edited by

David Little and Helmut Brammerts

Preface

This brochure reports on the LINGUA project International E-Mail Tandem Network, funded by the European Union. Universities in more than ten European countries have collaborated in the expansion of the network, in related research projects, and in the development of didactic materials to facilitate foreign language learning in tandem via the Internet.

The universities of Ålborg (DK), Århus (DK), Bochum (DE), Coimbra (PT), Dublin (IE), Mitthögskolan Härnösand/Sundsvall (SE), Oviedo (ES), ENST Paris (FR), Sheffield (GB), HKL Sittard (NL) and Trier (DE) were the official project partners. The universities of Matsuyama (Japan), Rhode Island (USA), and Turin (IT) have also contributed decisively to the success of the project.

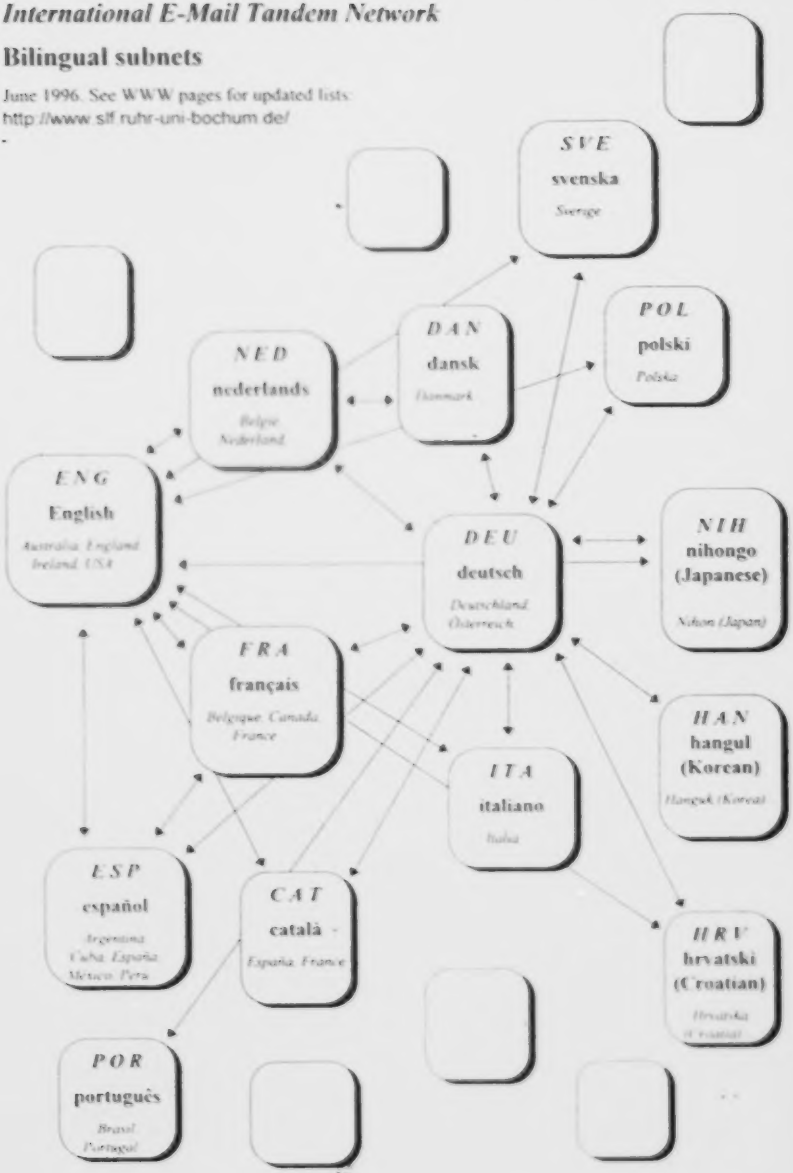
Now, towards the end of the second year of the project, the experiences of the participating institutions are being published in the hope that they will be of interest to other universities and educational institutions. Inevitably the brochure is something of a patchwork, bringing together as it does contributions by many hands. But we are confident that it provides a clear and convincing picture of the opportunities that now exist for language learning in tandem via the Internet. We very much hope that it will motivate others to use the services of the International E-Mail Tandem Network, and perhaps to embark on new developments of their own.

During the course of our project it became obvious that our goals could be achieved only through international collaboration between organizers, teachers and researchers. It became equally obvious, how-

International E-Mail Tandem Network

Bilingual subnets

June 1996. See WWW pages for updated lists:
http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/



ever, that the application of the project's findings must take account of the particular conditions and opportunities that obtain in each country, at each university, and for each language. This applies especially to individual learner counselling and the integration of tandem learning via the Internet in the local curriculum.

This brochure will be translated into the languages of all the project partners in order to reach the largest possible readership. Where appropriate the different versions of the brochure will address particular local circumstances. At the same time, however, approaches adopted in other countries will be referred to, even when they are not directly transferable to the local situation. The present version of the brochure has been prepared in the first instance for distribution by the Irish and United Kingdom partners in the project.

The University of Dublin, Trinity College (Centre for Language and Communication Studies) was the Irish partner in the project. CLCS has a long-standing research interest in (i) the application of new technologies to language learning, (ii) the design and implementation of self-access learning systems, and (iii) the theory and practice of learner autonomy. All three interests converge in the use of e-mail for tandem language learning. Since 1993–4 CLCS has been responsible for Trinity College's institution-wide language programme, which provides language learning opportunities for students whose degree studies do not include a foreign language. CLCS's membership of the International E-mail Tandem Network has added an important extra dimension to this programme, which in its structure and pedagogical approach emphasizes the interaction between language learning and language use. The programme is underpinned by a research-and-development project which includes the creation of virtual learning environments for tandem language learning. In 1995–6 two "rooms" have been built at Diversity University for the tandem learning of German and English. These will be regularly used in the academic year 1996–7 and will provide the focus for Ph.D. research.

The University of Sheffield is the United Kingdom partner in the project. From the outset the Modern Languages Teaching Centre at Sheffield has been one of the most active members of the International E-mail Tandem Network and currently has well over a hundred students learning languages by e-mail. It provides co-ordinators for three subnets, one of which it was responsible for establishing. It is exploring the feasibility of establishing further subnets in collaboration with Dutch and Japanese institutions. At Sheffield, e-mail tan-

dem partnerships have been successfully integrated into the language learning curriculum. True to its bent for innovation, Sheffield has already pioneered whole-class conferences using synchronous Internet communication, and is actively developing the use of net-based audio and video for the next generation of learners. Sheffield has played a significant role in developing tandem resources and has made these available to Internet users via its ftp server and WWW site. The technical expertise which underpins Sheffield's well-equipped Centre has regularly been placed at the service of other project partners. The Modern Languages Teaching Centre's commitment to the International E-mail Tandem Network has also provided it with an excellent focus for both individual and collaborative research. In addition to published work (Lewis, Woodin and St John 1996), the Centre can already lay claim to a completed M.A. dissertation on e-mail tandem language learning. A member of the Centre's staff is pursuing research into the effectiveness of e-mail tandem language learning for the award of a Ph.D.

When this LINGUA project was conceived in 1993–4, it was limited to universities because only university students could be assumed to have free Internet access (though we quickly discovered that there were often numerous problems to overcome). Now, in 1996, this situation has changed. Not only schools and institutions of adult education but also an increasing number of private individuals are gaining access to international computer networks. The opportunities that the Internet offers for autonomous and intercultural learning should be attractive to all these categories of Internet user, though it will be necessary to develop approaches specifically tailored to suit their needs.

The partner universities of the International E-Mail Tandem Network will continue to work together in the future, further developing the infrastructure of the network and its central services and opening it to other universities and educational institutions.

Helmut Brammerts and David Little
Bochum and Dublin June 1996

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1 Tandem language learning via the Internet and the International E-Mail Tandem Network

by Helmut Brammerts

with contributions from Annette Gaßdorf

English translation by Dawn D'Atri and Mike Calvert

1.1 Language learning in tandem using the Internet

1.1.1 An introductory example

María is a student of engineering at the University of Oviedo in Spain. She has been learning German for two years and will soon begin a work placement in a company in Germany. Her e-mail tandem partner is Ulrike, who is studying Romance Languages in Germany. Both write to each other at least twice a week; sometimes they discuss their personal experiences and problems (usually in their respective native languages). However, their personal correspondence has been given less priority of late to enable them to concentrate on more pressing concerns.

María has to apply to German companies to secure her placement and includes drafts of her letters of application, her curriculum vitae, etc. in her letters to Ulrike, who corrects the many mistakes and, above all, makes suggestions regarding changes in style. María often explains what she wants to say in Spanish and asks Ulrike to find a good way of formulating this in German. María has already received one reply; as she did not understand the whole letter, she sent it to Ulrike for clarification.

Ulrike has to make sure she passes her forthcoming translation examination, so she regularly sends María exercises from her translation course with her version of the translation and some questions for María to answer. Although María can always say if Ulrike's Spanish text is acceptable or not in terms of the quality of the Spanish, her knowledge of German is not good enough for her to be able to determine the quality of the translation.

In spite of this limitation, María and Ulrike believe that they learn a great deal when they are helping one another. They communicate some of the time in their respective native languages but they accept

that this is useful, since such authentic language is very important for their partner.

At first, they found correcting one another's texts very time-consuming and boring. Now they have learnt that, instead of correcting everything, they must agree upon what is to be corrected and how.

1.1.2 Language learning in tandem

Language learning in tandem is autonomous learning which does not normally replace language courses but rather arises from such courses and often complements them. It serves much the same function as independent preparation and follow-up work at home, learning from foreign language newspapers, books, radio broadcasts, television programmes or videos, and learning through communication with native speakers of the foreign language – during a stay abroad or by communicating with a penfriend, for example.

Learning in tandem has a good deal in common with the other forms of out-of-class learning already mentioned. For example, it mostly has to do with learning by communicating in the foreign language, and its effectiveness depends on the communication strategies and learning techniques the student is able to deploy. But there are also important differences.

Learning in tandem can be defined as a form of open learning, whereby two people with different native languages work together in pairs in order

- to learn more about one another's character and culture,
- to help one another improve their language skills, and often also
- to exchange additional knowledge – for example, about their professional life.

Tandem language learning takes place through authentic communication with a native speaker, who can correct the learner and also support him in his attempts to express himself. Since each partner can speak the other's language, at least to some extent, they have more opportunities to help one another: through explanations in the foreign language, through comparisons, etc. As learning in tandem is always based on communication between members of different language communities and cultures, it also facilitates intercultural learning.

Central to an understanding of tandem language learning is the

Principle of Reciprocity, which may be summarized thus: successful learning in tandem is based on the reciprocal dependence and mutual support of the partners; both partners should contribute equally to their work together and benefit to the same extent. Learners should be prepared and able to do as much for their partner as they themselves expect from their partner. They should not only dedicate the same amount of time to each language: they should also invest the same amount of energy in preparation, in the interest they show in the learning success of their partner, and in their concern for their partner's success in speaking and understanding their language.

This principle also underlines one of the great advantages of tandem learning partnerships compared with the normal situations in which learners and native speakers communicate. Whereas in the latter the learner is usually the only beneficiary, in the case of tandem learning both partners are in the role of learners, and have fewer inhibitions in expressing themselves in the foreign language than they would have in a class scenario or in relating to other native speakers. As both partners experience what it is like to be a learner of a language, they are more likely than other speakers to deal with their partner's problems with a greater sensitivity, patience and understanding.

The second important principle of language learning in tandem is the Principle of Learner Autonomy, according to which all tandem partners are responsible for their own learning: they alone determine what they want to learn and when, and they can only expect from their partner the support that they themselves have defined and asked for.

All tandem partners are experts in their own language and culture: if desired, they can read aloud, discuss topics selected by their partner, correct mistakes, make suggestions for improvement, etc. On the other hand, they have not usually been trained as teachers, which means that they need help in identifying learning goals, applying appropriate learning methods and subjecting them to critical evaluation, as well as in organizing the systematic preparation of learning material (for example, through grammar rules, etc.).

Another important reason to stress this responsibility for one's own learning is that aims and methods are rarely the same for both partners, since they generally have different learning experiences and needs. Common exercises for both partners are a realistic option only in special circumstances, for example, intensive tandem courses. Generally tandem learners have to take the different potential and inter-

ests of their partner into consideration. However, since each partner is even better than an advanced learner in his own language and culture, a fruitful learning partnership can develop even when the partners are at quite different levels.

Through tandem learning students can acquire and practise transferable skills of various kinds, for example: organizing themselves, their time and their work; managing their own learning; problem solving; obtaining and processing information; working as a member of a team; setting and meeting objectives; using the Internet. The better the partners co-operate to meet their own and their partners' learning needs, the greater the chance is that they will develop the skills necessary to cope in future autonomous situations, e.g. a period of residence abroad.

During the past thirty years, language learning in tandem has proved highly adaptable in the most diverse language learning contexts. Tandem courses (Brammerts 1993; Brammerts & Calvert 1996; Calvert 1992; Herfurth 1993) had already been established by the end of the 1960s with French–German youth meetings. The beginning of the 1980s saw the establishment of tandem partnerships between tourists and native speakers of the language they were learning (Wolff 1982) and between university students with different native languages (Müller, Schneider & Wertenschlag 1988). In the last few years, training courses using the tandem principle have been organized for members of the same profession from different countries. Recent reports on various forms of language learning in tandem can be found in Brammerts & Calvert (1996), Herfurth (1993, 1994), Pelz (1995), and Wolff (1994).

1.1.3 Tandem learning on the Internet

As a rule, there are not enough tandem partners available in any one place at the same time. For organizational and financial reasons there are also limited possibilities for students to attend intensive tandem courses. In an age of advanced communication technology, it is particularly attractive to introduce language learning with tandem partners located in their own country. Conventional means of communication (telephone, fax, letter) have never been seriously suggested as a means of communicating in tandem: they are too expensive, too impractical, and in some cases too slow. An exception might be made in the case of an exchange of letters between language learners and native speakers of their target language, or correspond-

ence between language classes, which might occasionally develop into bilingual tandem learning partnerships.

For some years now, however, new opportunities for language learning in tandem have been opened up with the rapid world-wide expansion of international computer networks, in particular the Internet. The technical requirements – access to e-mail and the Internet – either already exist or will be available in the immediate future to most institutions of higher education. This applies increasingly also to other educational institutions like schools and colleges. Network access via personal computers is also becoming affordable by private individuals. The technology itself requires little technical know-how: beginners can become familiar with the system within a few hours.

Three technical areas are especially interesting for tandem learning: e-mail, real-time written dialogues via the Internet, and the World Wide Web:

(i) E-mail is fast and inexpensive, and the programmes for writing and processing messages are constantly being simplified. For example, tandem partners can use on-line reference facilities such as dictionaries and grammar programmes while writing their messages; they can also include part or all of the letters they have received in the messages they are sending, and can correct them and/or comment on them. Anything that can be saved on a computer can be sent without difficulty as an attachment to an e-mail message: formatted texts, calculation tables, pictures, sound recordings, etc.

E-mail is not limited to communication between two individuals: so-called e-mail forums or e-mail conferences can be established on all computer networks. These forums permit simple communication between many participants at once; every e-mail message that is sent to such a forum is automatically distributed to the electronic mailboxes of all subscribers to the forum. Such forums facilitate intercultural discussion in larger groups as well as communication between teachers and learners. As we shall see, they can also assume important functions in supporting tandem work.

(ii) Communication via e-mail allows the partner's texts to be read with the help of on-line support and the answers to be well prepared with regard to language and content. Yet one can also make a date with one or more partners for a "(synchronous) computer

conference" at an agreed time. All entries via the keyboard immediately appear on all partners' monitors. Moreover, each participant can save the exchanges for further study.

Various kinds of program exist that allow synchronous written communication on the Internet. The concept of MOOs[1] is very interesting as it involves a text-based virtual reality environment featuring a country with cities and cities with streets, cafés, flats, etc. The users (visitors) can move around in this reality and gather information; they can meet other visitors in the different virtual rooms and converse with them via their keyboards and monitors; they can expand this virtual reality themselves by creating rooms and other objects; they can even simulate non-verbal communication (smiling, frowning, etc.).

As in oral conversations, exchanges are generally much shorter than in letters or e-mail messages. The partners can and have to react to each other very quickly, so that the language used is typically less elaborate than in letters, and tolerance of mistakes in one's own expression and in that of one's partner is high, as in spontaneous oral communication.

Synchronous communication can usefully complement asynchronous communication in tandem learning although some of the skills practised differ. Occasional meetings in a virtual environment for e-mail tandem partners can also help to clear up or avoid misunderstandings which can often occur due to the fact that they do not see each other and each lives in an environment not shared by their partner and they cannot see one another.

(iii) With the World Wide Web (WWW) on the Internet, it is easy for companies, government agencies and private individuals to offer all kinds of information world-wide without incurring large printing or distribution costs. Interested users get the newest versions for themselves at their convenience with programmes which are very easy to use. Multimedia documents which are constantly updated and saved on computers in locations far apart can be connected to each other by means of so-called hypertext links that make them appear to the user to be a single document. Communication is not only one-way, i.e., directed from the in-

1 MOO stands for *MUD Object Oriented*, and MUD for *Multi-User Domain* or *Multi-User Dungeon*.

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formation provider to the user. WWW forms which can be filled out by the users already guarantee a minimum of interaction between providers and users.

In terms of organizing tandem learning, the World Wide Web allows for the inexpensive preparation of easily updatable materials for learners and teachers, and simplifies certain tedious procedures, like subscribing and unsubscribing to forums or to the Tandem Dating Agency. It also makes it possible to publish and disseminate materials which learners have prepared with their partners.

Tandem learning on the Internet differs in several ways from face-to-face tandem, where the partners meet at one location:

- Communication between the tandem partners is primarily written and asynchronous. For the time being, listening and speaking hardly play a role. However, the opportunities to practise with one's partner all kinds of reading and writing skills, including translation, are enhanced. Tandem partners have time to go over the texts, corrections and tips in the target language sent by their partner and can utilize reference materials such as dictionaries, grammar books, etc. The same applies to e-mail messages that they write themselves.

- As a rule, tandem partners only know each other through their written exchanges. They cannot see their partner and therefore have no access to the non-verbal cues that one would have with face-to-face communication. Although this can occasionally cause misunderstanding or even a breakdown in communication, experience shows that many tandem partners – often due to the relative anonymity of the medium – lower their "affective filters" and form very open and frank personal relationships without having ever seen each other. Occasional meetings between partners in a MOO are obviously helpful; there they can quickly answer questions, sort out problems and build on the relationships they have made.

- Both partners remain in their home environment. Sometimes this can be a disadvantage for their work together, for example, if the conditions are not compatible (examination schedules, holidays, etc.). But being at home makes it easier for learners to provide their partners with up-to-date information and materials.

Tandem via the Internet is very attractive to both learners and teachers, as can be seen in the following arguments. They overlap, especially because teachers are naturally drawn to the advantages for their students:

Arguments for learners

"Tandem work is not a simulated exchange – as it often is in class – but rather communication with a real person from the country whose language is being learnt. That means that my partner is really interested in me. He wants to know more about me, and I want to know more about him. I can ask him questions and am interested in his answers."

"I find that I use the language because I have something to say rather than because it is an exercise I have to do. As a tandem partner I can work independently of the teacher but can nevertheless rely on an expert in the language I am studying. I learn a lot by taking his texts as an example, having him help me to formulate my sentences for me and having him correct me."

"My partner gives me help where and when I need it, for example, with exercises from my foreign language class, preparing for exams and presentations I have to give, or with letters that I need to write in the foreign language."

"Since my partner also needs my help, it is easier for me to ask him to help me somehow."

"Communication with a real partner is fun."

Arguments for teachers

"My work in doing corrections is made easier by the preliminary corrections made by the tandem partner. As a teacher, I am no longer solely responsible for the correction of each individual mistake."

"In a process-oriented writing course, tandem work can be sensibly integrated at different stages. For example, the student can discuss the gathering of ideas and the outline with her partner. She can also help with the editing of various drafts of the text."

"The discussion of cultural topics in class can be prepared and followed up through tandem work. This way my students can gather information and opinions on a tremendous variety of topics from their tandem partner. They can then share what they have

learnt both linguistically and culturally with the rest of their group."

"When it is an objective of the language class to promote autonomous learning, tandem work provides an opportunity to practise the appropriate strategies. At the same time, tandem learning can make the students understand that strategies for independent learning are useful and effective."

"It is possible for tandem partners to communicate information about the culture and institutions of their country using sophisticated language since both partners can communicate partly in their native language. If, however, they were obliged to use only the target language they would necessarily have to simplify the language and thus deprive their partner of both useful language about the topic and detailed information."

"The tandem learning situation seems to be ideal for translation practice. Both partners have full command of one language and partial command of the other, and both can use common reference material and have enough time to translate and comment on their partners' contributions."

1.2 The International E-Mail Tandem Network

1.2.1 Partner institutions, goals and organization

The International E-Mail Tandem Network was established by the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (Helmut Brammerts) together with its partner universities of Oviedo and Sheffield. Bochum was building on the experience it had gained since the summer of 1992 in administering a German-English forum for language learners (RIBO-L) with the University of Rhode Island and organizing student exchanges via e-mail. The network was created to enable students of the participating universities to exploit the potential of the Internet for language learning in tandem.

The network has been funded by the European Commission since July 1994. Twelve institutions of higher education from ten European countries are at present collaborating in the LINGUA-Project International E-Mail Tandem Network (No. 94-03/1507/D-VB and 95-03/1924/D-VB Ext.2):

- Aalborg Universitetscenter (Denmark), Institut for sprok og internationale kulturstudier (Annette Lorentsen)

- Aarhus Universitet (Denmark), Institut for germansk filologi (Harald Pors)
- Ruhr-Universität Bochum (Germany), Seminar für Sprachlehrforschung, Project co-ordination (Helmut Brammerts)
- Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal), Grupo de Estudos Germanisticos, Faculdade de Letras (Karl Heinz Delille)
- University of Dublin (Ireland), Trinity College, Centre for Language and Communication Studies (David Little), since 1995
- Mitthögskolan Härnösand/Sundsvall (Sweden), Institutionen för kultur och humaniora (Bengt Jonsson), since 1995
- Universidad de Oviedo (Spain), Dpto. de Filología Anglogermánica y Francesa (Juan Antonio Alvarez González, Margarita Blanco Hölscher), Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Industriales e Ingenieros Informáticos (Ana Ojanguren Sánchez)
- Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Télécommunications – ENST Paris (France), Département des Langues Vivantes (Veronika Bayer)
- University of Sheffield (United Kingdom), Modern Languages Teaching Centre (Tim Lewis), Division of Education (Mike Calvert)
- Hogeschool Katholieke Leergangen Sittard (Netherlands) (Annette Gaßdorf), since 1995
- Università degli Studi di Torino (Italy), Dipartimento di Szienze del Linguaggio e Letterature moderne e comparate (Donatella Ponti Dompé, Georg Hehmann), since 1996
- Universität Trier (Germany), Fachbereich II, Fach Linguistische Datenverarbeitung (Reinhard Köhler)

Other universities that have actively participated in the establishment of the network are: University of Rhode Island (USA) since 1993, Matsuyama University (Japan) and Université de Montréal (Canada) since 1994, and Yonsei-University Seoul (Korea) since 1995. A list of all current organizers and co-ordinators can be found in the appendix at the end of this brochure.

The goal of the International E-Mail Tandem Network is to create, in the international computer network, the Internet, the technical, organizational and didactic requirements for students of the participating institutions – and eventually even more universities – to

work together across national boundaries in order to learn languages from one another and to learn more about one another's culture by learning in tandem.

The number of language combinations varies according to demand and is continually growing. In spring 1996, there were eighteen e-mail combinations involving the following languages: Catalan, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Swedish, and Spanish. A current list of all these combinations can be found on the network's WWW pages.

The setting up and constant maintenance of the central computer (especially the WWW server and the server for e-mail forums) are vital technical requirements. Defining local technical needs has also proved to be extremely important; complicated measures have had to be taken at a number of universities to guarantee Internet access for students and teachers.

The organizational requirements include:

- measures designed to facilitate the work between the partner universities and network organizers and co-ordinators (regular work meetings, permanent e-mail forum for organizers, etc.);
- measures designed to establish and co-ordinate the bilingual subnets (selection of subnet co-ordinators, establishment of a forum, expansion of the WWW information pages, etc.);
- central services for subnets and users, especially the centralized Tandem Dating Agency.

The partner institutions have carried out considerable research and development work in the establishment of didactic materials for learning in tandem on the Internet. The results have been published in academic publications (see the bibliography at the end of this brochure) as well as in practical tips for tandem learners, teachers and organizers, which are distributed in the languages of the various subnets through the World Wide Web, through the Tandem Dating Agency, and in printed form at the participating universities.

The focus of our research and development in 1996 lies in the question of learner counselling and support (see section 2 below), in the integration of language learning in tandem in local curricula (see section 3 below), and in investigating new technical possibilities for autonomous and intercultural learning in tandem.

1.2.2 The bilingual subnets

The bilingual subnets are the key element of the International E-Mail Tandem Network's structure. They allow learners with matching native and target languages to work together: ENG–ESP (English–español) is, for example, the subnet for English-speaking learners of Spanish and Spanish-speaking learners of English, DEU–FRA (deutsch–français) for French-speaking learners of German and German-speaking learners of French.

Each subnet includes:

- e-mail access to the central Tandem Dating Agency, which finds a tandem partner for each participant;
- at least one bilingual forum, in which the participants discuss a variety of topics in both languages and can ask each other questions and give advice;
- an information server, where the participants can find teaching and learning materials and where they can even enter documents themselves, such as background materials about their country or bilingual texts which they have produced together with their partner.

Two or more co-ordinators, ideally at least one for each language, co-ordinate each subnet together. They organize on-line support for learners and teachers, are responsible for the content of the information server for their subnet, moderate the forum discussions, and decide on which additional services should be offered within their subnet, like expert services, special forums for particular projects between individual classes, meetings or tutors' office hours in MOOs, etc.

The co-ordinators are relatively independent in the organization of the tandem work within their subnet. The open exchange of all materials between the subnets is nevertheless one of the general principles of the International E-Mail Tandem Network. All subnets can therefore benefit when new forms of organization, teaching aids or technical possibilities are developed by one of them.

All subnet co-ordinators and organizers in the various institutions involved make joint decisions about the network's future development; for example, the setting up of new subnets, the naming of subnet co-ordinators, and the defining of the network's main principles. The International Tandem E-Mail Network thrives at the same time on the initiatives of the individual subnets and on co-operation

between the subnets to solve common or similar problems.

For practical and economic reasons, the Tandem Dating Agency is organized as a central service for the participants of all subnets. However, the subnet co-ordinators themselves write all the texts that are sent by the Dating Agency for various purposes: requesting patience when a partner is not yet available, offering initial tips for tandem work, etc.

There are not as yet mechanisms for ensuring compatible tandem pairings. Partners are therefore usually paired at random. They are nevertheless told that they can request the address of a new tandem partner if they do not get along with their original partner or if their partner does not answer or stops writing. Participants, however, seldom follow the advice to change partners on a regular basis. Groups or institutions which desire a closer collaboration can request that the Tandem Dating Agency match their students with those of a particular partner university or group. In the near future, the Tandem Dating Agency will experiment with using criteria such as age, profession, geographical location, etc.

The information server of the International E-Mail Tandem Network contains a specific area for each subnet in addition to general information. Currently, the focus is on tips in both subnet languages about tandem work and forum discussions, as well as information that can be printed out and distributed locally at participating universities. It is planned that the forum archives and texts created by tandem pairs will be offered on the WWW. Applying to the Tandem Dating Agency and to forums will also soon be possible using WWW forms.

Experience has shown that counselling and support of the tandem partners is essential to make tandem work effective and to improve the learners' autonomous learning skills. The subnet co-ordinators will correspondingly expand and update their centralized information through the forums, WWW, the Dating Agency and other services.

The local support of the tandem partners through individual counselling and the integration of tandem work in local curricula is even more important. Sections 2 and 3 below deal with these problem areas.

1.2.3 Future prospects

The current project partners intend that language learning

in tandem on the Internet will develop in the following directions:

- New language pairs will be added.
- Schools and colleges of further and adult education will become more involved.
- New forms of counselling will be developed for learners who wish to improve their foreign language knowledge solely through tandem learning on the Internet.
- Beginning in 1996, pilot schemes will study the application of new technical possibilities such as synchronous audio and video connections to language learning in tandem via the Internet.
- The new database of materials for face-to-face and distance tandem learning via the Internet will be enhanced.

2 Learner autonomy and learner counselling

by David Little

with contributions from
Helmut Brammerts, Karin Kleppin, and Ana Ojanguren

2.1 What is learner autonomy?

2.1.1 A working definition

In the domain of formal learning (i.e., learning that takes place within one or another kind of educational framework), autonomy is a capacity for self-direction. This capacity is exercised in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of learning activities, and necessarily embraces both the content and the process of learning. Learners take their first steps towards autonomy when they consciously accept responsibility for their own learning; and they develop their autonomy through a continuous effort to understand what they are learning, why, how, and with what degree of success. The effect of learner autonomy is to break down the barriers that so easily erect themselves between formal learning and the rest of the learner's life. In other words, it is through the exercise of autonomy that learners integrate the knowledge and skills they acquire in formal learning contexts with the totality of what they are.

2.1.2 Where does the concept of learner autonomy come from?

Much of the current interest in learner autonomy arises from theories of adult education that came to prominence in the 1970s. Thus *Autonomy and foreign language learning*, Henri Holec's pioneering study (1981), takes as its starting point the argument that the purpose of adult education should be to prepare the individual learner for participation in the democratic process. According to Janne, for example, adult education should become "an instrument for arousing an increasing sense of awareness and liberation in man, and, in some cases, an instrument for changing the environment itself. From the idea of man 'product of his society', one moves to the idea of man 'producer of his society'" (cit. Holec 1981, p.3). There is, of course, nothing new about this view: in one form or another it has underlain learner-centred pedagogies and liberal philosophies of education at

least since the reforms of Comenius in the early seventeenth century.

This historical fact must not mislead us into thinking that we can achieve autonomy only via a particular kind of pedagogy, however. On the contrary: autonomy is a general human capacity that all of us possess to the extent that we are capable of independent thought and action. In the normal course of development children learn to think, but also to think about thinking; they develop beliefs, but also beliefs about beliefs. Thinking and having beliefs are characteristics of first-order intentional systems, whereas thinking about thinking and having beliefs about beliefs are characteristics of second-order intentional systems (cf. Astington 1994, pp.23f.). Our potential for autonomous behaviour derives in large part from the fact that we are second-order as well as first-order intentional systems. The American philosopher Geoffrey Dworkin puts the matter thus:

> autonomy is conceived of as a second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences and values. By exercising such a capacity, persons define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and take responsibility for the kind of person they are. (Dworkin 1988, p.20)

Autonomy is the goal of developmental learning (i.e., the learning that takes place in the course of normal child development), in the sense that without it we are unable to function as fully empowered members of the society into which we have been born. It is also fundamental to the process of developmental learning, in the sense that each of us cannot help but construct his or her own knowledge. This is not to deny the essential role played in early child development by parents, siblings and other caregivers; but it is to insist on the psychological fact that each of us has to do his or her own learning.

Of course, the extent and nature of the autonomy that characterizes developmental learning is infinitely variable. This arises partly from differences in individual endowment, and partly from differences in the socio-cultural environment in which learning takes place. As Premack (1984) has pointed out, there is an undeniable pedagogical element in child rearing; and inevitably, within any particular tradition of child rearing, some parents turn out to be better teachers than others. Within the Western tradition, for example, empirical re-

search suggests that the children of "authoritative" parents enjoy a number of significant learning advantages over the children of "authoritarian" parents (see Astington 1994, pp.195f.).

There is also great variability in the degree to which the autonomy that arises from developmental learning is a matter of conscious awareness. In relation to language use, for example, autonomy depends on the development of metalinguistic knowledge; that is, awareness of language as a formal system governed by rules and a medium of communication deployed according to norms and conventions. For without such knowledge we cannot use language creatively in the Chomskyan sense, to convey our own particular meanings. Now, metalinguistic knowledge develops first as implicit (that is, unconscious) knowledge (see Karmiloff-Smith 1992); and the extent to which it becomes explicit (that is, conscious) knowledge depends on factors largely beyond the individual learner's control. For instance, children growing up in families where language is often the topic of conversation, may be expected to develop explicit metalinguistic knowledge to a much higher degree than children growing up in families where conversation itself is sparse.

We can summarize the argument of this sub-section as follows: All of us are autonomous as a result of developmental and experiential[1] learning; and for all of us, that learning arose from a process that was itself autonomous. We vary from one another not only in the precise degree of our autonomy, but also in the extent to which it is a capacity of which we are explicitly aware and which we can seek to exploit consciously. Despite this variability, however, it is probably safe to say that for the great majority of us, the development of autonomy as a central pedagogical goal in formal learning contexts entails the development of new capacities for conscious metacognitive activity.

2.1.3 Autonomy in formal learning contexts

Although our working definition of autonomy effectively describes all genuinely successful learners, the development of autonomy has not usually been a central goal in formal learning. Accordingly, its emergence in some learners and not in others has largely been a matter of chance (though it might be argued that in Western

1 Experiential learning is the learning that takes place for the most part unconsciously in the course of day-to-day living.

societies learners from certain kinds of background – educated, middle-class, placing a high value on analytical conversation in the home – enjoy a significant advantage). Following the argument of 2.1.2, current interest in putting autonomy at the top of the pedagogical agenda arises from a conviction that explicit, conscious autonomy – knowing what you are learning, why, how, and with what degree of success – is something that in principle lies within the grasp of all learners. Such a view must also allow, of course, that there will be infinite variation among learners as regards the extent to which they become autonomous and the extent to which their autonomy admits metacognitive reflection.

2.1.4 Autonomy in second language learning

According to our working definition, autonomy is a capacity for self-determination as regards both the content and the process of learning; and it is through the development of autonomy that we are able to integrate the knowledge and skills we acquire through formal learning with the totality of what we are. These considerations assume particular urgency in the case of second language learning, thanks to the relation between language learning and language use.

If the purpose of language learning in formal contexts is to develop communicative proficiency in the target language, then success in learning is a matter of being able to use that language autonomously in the world outside the classroom. In order to achieve this, learners must have a language learning experience that is consistently underpinned by language use; in other words, the target language must as far as possible be the medium through which the teaching/learning process is conducted. For it is only thus that we can develop proficiency in spontaneous face-to-face oral communication. At the same time, however, we should recognize that maintaining our proficiency in a second language after the end of formal learning is a matter not merely of using but of continuing to expand our skills and knowledge. That is, successful language use over time depends on continued language learning. This is true of our proficiency in our mother tongue – we are constantly encountering new words and having to work out how to cope with new kinds of discourse, though mostly we are unconscious of the learning that is taking place. But it is especially true of our proficiency in a second language, where we need to be ready to turn almost any occasion of language use into an

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occasion of conscious language learning. Naturally, we shall be able to do this the more effectively if our formal language learning has taught us how to plan, monitor and evaluate our own learning; that is, if we have developed knowledge and skills in relation not only to the target language as a medium of communication but to the business of language learning.

2.1.5 How do we foster the development of learner autonomy?

We have defined autonomy as a capacity for self-direction, and we have argued that all of us are autonomous to the extent that we are capable of independent thought and action. In such a definition the concept of autonomy inevitably emphasizes the individuality of the learner. At the same time, however, we have recognized that socio-cultural context plays an indispensable role in all learning. This is another way of saying that learning is inescapably an interactive process in which new knowledge and skills are gradually assimilated to the knowledge and skills we already possess. All developmental and much experiential learning requires stimulus and input from outside the learner: from parents, brothers and sisters, friends, and so on; and the same is true of learning in formal contexts. Self-instruction may appear to be an exception to this rule, but in fact its success depends on our capacity to internalize processes of social interaction as psychological activity.

Thus although autonomy is a capacity for self-determination that enables the learner to act independently, it develops out of interaction with others. In other words, the freedom it brings is never absolute, but always constrained by the interdependence which is our social condition. Accordingly, the development of autonomy in language learners is not a matter of leaving them to their own devices. On the contrary, it requires that they are fully supported in the twin dimensions of language learning and language use. If the target language itself is to be the principal medium of learning, learners must be assisted in their attempts to use it; for only thus will they achieve their communicative goals, and it is through success in communication that learning takes place and motivation is maintained. At the same time, learners must be supported in the development of conscious language learning skills. That is, they must be shown how to plan, monitor and evaluate learning activities; how to select appropriate problem-solving strategies; and so on.

According to this argument the teacher's central role is to pro-

vide learners with the support, or scaffolding, that enables them to move successfully through the "zone of proximal development", to borrow Vygotsky's celebrated phrase (Vygotsky 1978). The development of learner autonomy is not only a matter of appropriate interaction between teacher and learners, however. In successful classroom experiments (see, e.g., Dam 1995), group work has tended to play a central role. If learning is essentially an interactive process, then the development of learner autonomy is a collaborative matter; and the support that learners can give to one another plays a crucial role in the transition from dependence on the teacher to wholly independent task performance.

2.1.6 The special case of tandem language learning

Tandem language learning occupies a position somewhere between classroom learning and self-instruction. It is axiomatic that tandem partners must support one another in their language learning without resorting to the techniques of traditional teaching. In order to achieve this, they need to be able to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning, they must know how best to exploit the native speaker competence of their partner, and they must have an insight into the language learning process that enables them to respond appropriately to their partner's learning initiatives. Unless they are given a great deal of guidance and support, learners who have not already achieved a significant degree of autonomy are likely to find tandem learning difficult to cope with and almost impossible to sustain.

2.2 Tandem language learning via the Internet

2.2.1 Potential benefits

At this point it is worth recapitulating the potential benefits of tandem language learning via the Internet:

- Your partner is a native speaker of your target language and thus fully acquainted not only with the language but with its culture.
- You can communicate with your partner on topics of genuine mutual interest, and thus avoid the artificiality that so often characterizes communication in foreign language classrooms.
- Individually or in consultation with your partner, you can determine your own learning targets, study methods, and working arrangements.

- Your relationship with your tandem partner is founded on the desire you each have to learn the other's language, which means that your attempts to use your target language should be dealt with sensitively and patiently.
- If necessary, you can use your own language to help clarify problems and overcome difficulties.

2.2.2 Potential difficulties

Clearly, to be maximally successful, all tandem learning requires that both partners know how to direct their own learning and how to exploit the particular conditions of their tandem partnership. At the same time, however, difficulties will arise if either partner attaches greater importance to personal learning objectives than to the maintenance of a collaborative learning partnership. Following the argument developed in 2.1.5, the quality of individual learning will always be determined by the quality of the collaboration on which it feeds.

Tandem language learning via the Internet has two particular areas of difficulty to contend with. One arises from the fact that partners are working at a distance from one another rather than face-to-face. This means that each remains in his or her own environment, with different routines, opportunities and obligations. For one partner, tandem language learning may be (part of) a fully accredited university course, while for the other it is not; one partner may get plenty of teacher support in the development of autonomous learning techniques, while the other does not; for one partner tandem learning may be part of a larger course of language learning, while for the other it is not; one partner may have easy and immediate access to the Internet, while the other has to share scarce resources with a large number of other students; and so on. In most cases these are difficulties that we must learn to live with, but it is important not to underestimate the extent to which they can undermine even the most experienced and highly motivated learners. We must also recognize that the distance separating the two partners makes it easy for one of them to sever communication without explanation.

The other area of potential difficulty specific to tandem language learning via the Internet arises from the fact that it uses writing rather than speech. One obvious problem is the recent tendency for language teaching at school to emphasize the development of proficiency in oral rather than written communication. Another problem is that when

tandem learning is via e-mail, students may think of their partner as a pen-pal rather than a collaborator in learning, which may trivialize the relationship. Also, asynchronous written communication differs from face-to-face oral communication in that it does not allow partners to negotiate their way around misunderstandings. It should be noted, however, that this is much less a problem for the synchronous written communication that is possible in MOOs.

2.2.3 The skills learners need

Whether conducted face-to-face or via the Internet, tandem language learning requires a certain minimum proficiency in the target language. This is acquired mostly by following a normal language course, more rarely through self-instruction. Clearly, the success of tandem learning depends on the ability of both partners to (continue to) learn autonomously. But equally clearly, language classrooms develop learner autonomy to very different degrees, and self-instructional programmes do not necessarily encourage learners to set their own learning targets, monitor their performance of learning tasks, and evaluate their own progress. This means that if we want to promote successful tandem learning, we shall also have to foster the development of autonomy in our learners. According to our earlier arguments, of course, this will benefit their language learning generally, helping them (for example) to make the most of communication in the language classroom and the opportunities for further learning that arise during visits abroad.

Before students embark on a course of tandem learning they are likely to need advice on how to organize their learning, manage their attitude to learning, and develop appropriate learning techniques and strategies. In particular they need to understand the difference between knowing about their target language – grammatical or sociolinguistic facts, for example – and being able to use the language spontaneously as a medium of communication; and they also need to know the difference between learning new things and consolidating the knowledge and/or skills they already have.

In order to get the most out of their tandem partnership, learners must be able to create communication situations which provide good learning potential for themselves and their partner. This is partly a matter of selecting learning activities and materials that correspond to the interests and needs of both partners, so that they have plenty to communicate about; but it is also a matter of knowing how to use

their partner's utterances as a model and how to motivate their partner to help them formulate the meanings they wish to communicate and correct their mistakes.

Early agreement is necessary between partners on how to handle the correction of errors. On the one hand, all language learners need feedback on their performance; on the other hand, as we noted above, tandem partners are not usually trained teachers, which means that although as native speakers they can usually tell when something is wrong, they will not necessarily be able to say why it is wrong. When the medium of communication is e-mail, one obvious technique is for the native speaker to indicate errors by reformulation. In tandem learning by synchronous written channels (e.g., MOOs) it is less clear how to solve the problem of correction.

2.2.4 Forms of instruction and tutoring for tandem learning via the Internet

There are various ways in which we can seek to develop the knowledge and skills that our students need in order to become successful tandem learners. In most circumstances it is probably a good idea to use as many of them as possible.

Written introductions to the basic principles of tandem language learning can be delivered to students over the Internet (WWW, e-mail), or in hard copy (as in this brochure). Particular learning schemes can be usefully supported by locally produced hand-outs designed to help students organize and keep track of their learning. Suggestions, learning tips and answers to particular questions about tandem learning usually take the form of short texts. These can easily be communicated via the WWW, so that learners can download them and print them out when appropriate (see, for example, the help for tandem learners under construction at http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/email/deueng/tips.html). Experience suggests that it is also helpful to send these texts to learners via e-mail, for example through the Tandem Dating Agency or the co-ordinators in the forums. At this stage, advice on the following areas already exists or is planned:

- How do learners get started?
- What should learners talk about with their partner?
- When should which language be used?
- How should learners correct their partner's texts?

- How exactly can learners learn from their partner's texts?
- How can learners help their partner formulate his or her texts?
- How can intercultural learning be promoted in tandem partnerships?
- What opportunities exist for synchronous communication (MOOs etc.) on the Internet?
- How can students learn to translate in tandem?
- How can students learn to write letters in tandem?
- What are the technical opportunities and problems attaching to tandem learning via the Internet?

Besides providing suggestions, learning tips and answers to specific questions, it is also possible to counsel individual learners via the Internet. There are plans to test two forms of counselling, one via e-mail, using particular advisor addresses that learners can write to seeking help on particular problems, and the other via MOOs. This latter corresponds more closely to face-to-face counselling because it permits the immediate reciprocal exchange of questions and answers.

2.3 Two approaches to counselling for tandem learning via the Internet

Counselling learners has been a general concern of the International E-Mail Tandem Project. Two brief case studies provide some indication of the kind of procedures that have been adopted and the problems that have been encountered.

2.3.1 Counselling via e-mail at the University of Oviedo

The integration of e-mail tandem learning in the curriculum of the University of Oviedo has proved impossible for several reasons, chief among them the requirements of the accreditation system and the size of classes. Proposals for new courses have to be endorsed by many different boards before they can be implemented; and there are on average 116 students per class and insufficient computers for all students to be fully involved in tandem learning by e-mail. The lecturers and teachers who are in charge of tuition have to monitor the work of such large numbers of students – usually three groups per teacher – that they find it very difficult to assess the work of the tandem learners, which may or may not be integrated in any of the groups that they teach.

During the first year of the project (1994–5), participants and co-ordinators realized that the forum needed not only someone to encourage communication by suggesting topics for discussion and activities for pair work, but also someone to comment on the quality of the discourse, and help with problems of grammar and vocabulary. This led them to appoint one linguistic assistant for each subnet they were involved in: DEU–ESP, ENG–ESP and ESP–FRA. The job of the assistants was (i) to suggest tasks that students could perform in the forum, and (ii) – and most important – to try to help students improve their knowledge of the target language by writing comments on their mistakes. Depending on the type of mistake, the comments were sent either to all the Spanish members of each forum or to the individual student who had made the mistake.

For the academic year 1995–6 the approach to linguistic assistance was modified because it was felt that communication between tandem partners also needed to be improved. Since students at Oviedo are spread across a very dispersed university campus, some faculties being 30 kilometres away from others, and since communication between tandem partners is private, the co-ordinators did not receive much in the way of feedback. Accordingly they decided to focus linguistic assistance on giving the students tasks to be done with their partners, and especially on analysing the results of such work in terms not only of linguistic "quality", which in principle should be guaranteed by the contribution of the native speaker partner, but of methodological problems deriving from autonomous learning and from the particular characteristics of the means of communication used, namely e-mail and the computer.

2.3.2 Face-to-face counselling at Ruhr-Universität Bochum

In 1994 the Ruhr-Universität Bochum introduced individual counselling for learners of foreign languages who, in addition to or after having completed regular language courses, wanted to improve their foreign language proficiency either by working on their own or through face-to-face tandem learning. Since the end of 1995 the provision of counselling has been extended to those students who are working in tandem via the Internet with learners from other countries.

The Bochum counselling concept assumes that autonomous learners

- *know their level of language ability*, i.e. can assess their strengths

and weaknesses (for this reason, the counselling service tries to offer individual and professional language diagnosis in as many languages as possible);

- *are aware of what they can realistically hope to achieve, given their current level of proficiency* (the counsellor must be prepared to help them to formulate specific goals);
- *are aware of the ways in which their e-mail tandem partner can help them to fulfil their aims* (the counsellor must be able to suggest a variety of learning strategies and techniques to achieve these goals);
- *understand the possibilities that the tandem situation offers them* (the counsellor's advisory repertoire must include, e.g., advice on the most important tandem principles, on the opportunities, limitations and needs of the tandem partner, on the effective choice of language, and on methods of correcting each other's work);
- *know how to reflect on the language learning process* (to this end, the counsellor must encourage them to talk about their learning experiences and support them in seeking a wider range of learning options).

The counselling should be based, where possible, on concrete problems and pieces of work in the target language (e.g., messages received and sent via e-mail). However, if no counsellor is available for a specific language, then a non-language-specific counselling session is also considered highly advisable.

In Bochum, efforts are being made to integrate autonomous learning, in particular autonomous learning in tandem, into the normal curriculum. Students can gain credits for their tandem work and these credits are equivalent (either partially or completely) to regular language courses (see section 3 below). The counsellors then perform the corresponding control function in compulsory counselling sessions. This link between advisory and control functions initially seemed to have only positive consequences, as increasing numbers of students took up the offer of counselling sessions. More recently, however, colleagues at Bochum have also reported that serious disadvantages arise from this combination of contradictory functions. Many students concentrate on convincing their counsellor that they really have worked autonomously and effectively: they are not really interested in a counselling session with someone they can trust and with whom they can openly discuss their problems.

3 The integration of e-mail tandem learning into language courses

by Mike Calvert

with contributions from
Christian Beck, Annette Gaßdorf, and Lesley Walker

It has already been demonstrated that e-mail has a valuable role to play in providing opportunities for language and intercultural learning. All students, whether enrolled on language courses or not, can benefit from access to e-mail in a variety of ways, for example, seeking linguistic support from a tandem partner or using it as a research tool. Such informal use has a role to play, but in this section of the brochure the case will be made that the integration of e-mail tandem learning into language courses is both desirable and beneficial for students and teachers.

In this section we argue that there are strong pedagogical reasons for wanting to integrate e-mail tandem learning partially or fully into the curriculum and that, with adequate institutional support, it can be a powerful learning tool. After looking at the pedagogical benefits, different degrees of integration and some of the issues that have to be addressed at an institutional level, we offer some possible models of integration that can be applied or adapted to the circumstances of different institutions and courses.

3.1 Pedagogical benefits

There are a number of pedagogical benefits in tandem learning by e-mail which support its integration in language courses. First among these is the quality and range of the material available to the student. For students researching a particular topic tandem partners can provide up-to-date information which might be difficult to find by other means.

Secondly, tandem learning by e-mail involves real communication: through it students are not only able to gather factual information but get an insight into different attitudes and perspectives relating to that information.

Thirdly, the use of e-mail helps the student to keep pace with the changes that are taking place in communication. In the same way

that decades ago vocational trends led to the introduction of courses in Spanish, French and German for the telephone, so now language courses should take account of the changes that are taking place in the world of communications and prepare learners to cope with them.

Finally, the flexibility of e-mail and the way in which it places more responsibility on the student to determine his/her own language needs and exploit the medium to the full, should help to promote learner autonomy (cf. section 2 above).

3.2 Curriculum

Integration is a relative concept, and the extent to which tandem learning by e-mail is integrated into the curriculum will depend on a host of factors. These factors will determine whether tandem learning by e-mail constitutes a course in its own right, a compulsory or optional element of an existing course, or is merely an optional extra available to those wishing to exploit it.

It does not follow that two institutions in different countries using tandem learning have to exploit e-mail to the same extent. For example, it could be the case that in one institution e-mail is an essential component of the course but in the other it is optional. It must be said, however, that a measure of parity is highly desirable as it helps to promote equal commitment on the part of the students in both countries. The same advantage accrues from matching tandem partners according to their academic discipline. However, one has to accept that local learning conditions are seldom going to match so perfectly as to enable both parties to achieve the same degree of integration in their work. This should not, however, hinder effective tandem work, which is based on the principle of each partner following his/her own learning goals and methods.

3.3 Institutional issues

In order for e-mail tandem learning to be integrated into courses, account must be taken of three key factors: skills, facilities, and accreditation.

3.3.1 Skills

For students to be able to benefit fully from using e-mail it is clear that they need adequate training. This may well involve a

preparatory course for those unfamiliar with it (cf. Annette Gaßdorf's writing course, described in 3.4.1 and 7.6 below). It is also necessary to provide technical support that students can draw on in the event of problems. Evidence suggests that some students are easily discouraged if they encounter practical difficulties when using computers in general and e-mail in particular.

It is not only students who need training. Staff who are proficient users of e-mail are much more likely to promote its use, be prepared to integrate it into their courses and, of course, be able to handle the material that is sent to them. Training should not, however, be restricted to technical skills. New technologies imply a changing role for the teacher, and this needs to be explored in depth. Understanding the pedagogical benefits that these technologies bring, facilitating their use, and counselling and supporting students, are all key skills.

3.3.2 Facilities

The extent to which these skills are developed may well depend on the extent to which teachers and learners have access to e-mail and the Internet. In British universities it is common for students to be given an e-mail account when they first register, and there are computer terminals on campus in libraries, academic departments and halls of residence. It is fast becoming the norm that lecturers have access to the Internet in their offices. Students and staff in other countries may not be as fortunate.

If tandem learning by e-mail is to be a compulsory part of a course or a course in its own right, it is essential that access is readily available. It is important that no students or groups of students are disadvantaged in any way.

3.3.3 Accreditation

Accreditation is a central issue in integrating tandem learning by e-mail in the curriculum. If the prior conditions – adequate skills and training in, and access to, computers – are in place, there are a number of ways in which students' work can be accredited. In Bochum credits are awarded to students who have satisfied the course criteria (which include, incidentally, attendance at compulsory counselling sessions; see 2.3.2 above), and in Sheffield a system of credits is being introduced for both face-to-face tandem work and distance tandem work via e-mail. The possibility of accrediting work carried out by students working abroad has also been discussed. For exam-

ple, a Bochum student who met the criteria for a credit whilst following an Erasmus course in Sheffield would be recommended to receive one by the Modern Languages Teaching Centre in Sheffield. Again, if both partners have their work accredited this can contribute towards some parity of commitment and each can depend with greater confidence on the support and continued involvement of the other.

3.4 Examples of integration

3.4.1 A writing skills course

In the German Department of the Hogeschool Katholieke Leergangen in Sittard, Holland (HKLS), Annette Gaßdorf and her colleagues have set up a writing skills course entitled *Communication without problems: formal and informal letter writing*. The institution educates secondary teachers and offers a degree course in German. Writing is a compulsory element in all four years of the course. In their first year students join the International E-mail Tandem Network, which is integrated into the above-mentioned course.

The aims of the course are fourfold:

- to provide students with authentic contact with German partners in Germany;
- to improve their writing skills in the area of formal and informal letter writing;
- to help them develop autonomous strategies for language learning;
- to familiarize them with electronic media.

At the beginning of the course students are trained in the use of word processors and e-mail over a period of eight weeks. They then correspond with their German partner for twelve weeks. As a rule they write about topics that arise spontaneously in the course of their correspondence, but the teacher also provides suggestions that can be followed up. The e-mail correspondence is prepared off-line, at home or at HKLS. Preparing the text in this way encourages careful self-monitoring and correction techniques.

Throughout the course students are introduced to correction models which enable them to monitor their own work and correct themselves. The writing skills course also focuses on such issues as layout and structure, punctuation, linking expressions, etc.

At the beginning of the twelve-week period students are given two sample letters which contain particular problems of grammar and idiom. These are analysed. Each week the students bring their letters to the tutorials, where they are corrected and individual errors are closely studied. As part of their "error therapy techniques" the students draw up an individual "error protocol". In this protocol they list the number and type of errors they make, an activity designed to make them aware of their most persistent errors and help them to arrive at a strategy for avoiding them in the future. The teacher and students discuss the list. In addition, there is a "frequent errors" list which is drawn up by the students and can be used in the correction phase. Also, students are helped to use dictionaries efficiently.

The course is introduced in the first year for a specific reason: it helps students to free themselves from the more traditional methods that they have been accustomed to. When students first arrive at HKLS they have considerable difficulty in deciding which errors need to be corrected by their German partner, and they lack the ability to move beyond correcting single errors to an awareness of their own individual problems and a correction strategy to remedy them.

The course has been a success. The output in terms of the length and sophistication of students' letters to their tandem partners is much greater than in courses where writing assignments are set by the teacher. A key factor is the frequency and quality of the responses of their German partners. The courses are to be extended to the Dutch-English subnet.

3.4.2 Integrating e-mail into intercultural studies

The writing course at HKLS is an example of total integration of e-mail tandem learning into a course. Our second example offers two alternative ways of using tandem learning by e-mail, either as an adjunct to a conventional course or as a course in its own right that is supported by counselling sessions.

The starting point for the consideration of integrating e-mail into intercultural studies has been the courses that are offered in German universities at the present time. On these courses, the lecturer outlines aspects of a cultural phenomenon and the students are presented with the task of carrying out an independent investigation of an issue related to it. Students present their findings to the group and submit a written assignment at the end of the course. The work is assessed on the quality of the presentation and the written work.

How might tandem learning by e-mail be successfully integrated into such a course? In the case of a conventional course supported by e-mail the students would identify their area of interest and use e-mail as a research tool. Students could be given specific tasks which would require the use of e-mail to support their work which would be presented and submitted in the usual way.

In the case of an e-mail-based course the new approach would put much more emphasis on autonomous learning. At the beginning of the course two plenary sessions would be held. One would focus on the technical aspects of using e-mail or the Internet as a research tool. The second would be devoted to introducing an issue in depth and suggesting ways in which aspects of it could be pursued. The students would then determine for themselves the amount of time that they would like to devote to communicating with their partners, exploring the problem, and gathering information. Compulsory individual counselling sessions would take place every two weeks to enable the students to receive technical and academic support and to help the lecturer monitor the progress of the students. Presentations and assignments would be produced as before, and the former given at plenary sessions towards the end of the course. A logical extension of this model would allow students to determine their own area of interest and carry out the research independently, consulting regularly with their tutor.

It is worth reminding ourselves at this point of the prerequisites of such an approach and the conditions likely to favour its successful implementation: access to computers and technicians, adequate technical and learning skills and training, suitable partners who have a similar commitment/interest and a clear system of monitoring and accreditation.

The benefits of integrating tandem learning by e-mail into such a course are considerable. For one thing, students can access a wealth of information from their partners which would be difficult or virtually impossible to obtain by other means. Up-to-date statistics, treatment of particular phenomena in the media, and the individual responses of partners to those phenomena, are all extremely valuable. Also, as was stated above, e-mail communication is real communication, and as such involves the transmission of feelings, reactions and attitudes as well as facts. In short, e-mail offers immediacy, accessibility, flexibility and authenticity. A course in Intercultural Studies would be ideally placed to harness the benefits of such an approach.

3.5 Translation

Translation can play a part in e-mail communication as both an end in itself and an element in other tasks. It can be argued that translation is a better task if carried out in tandem as both partners know the two languages involved and, whilst neither is likely to be a skilled translator, both can judge the quality of the version that is written in their language. This presupposes, of course, that each has a minimum level of receptive and productive proficiency in his/her target language and preferably is well matched with his/her partner. The higher the level of competence, the more accurate and successful the work is likely to be.

At the level of supporting one another's learning, e-mail learners can ask their partners for an explanation of a particular word or expression. A dictionary may well not provide either a translation or any indication of usage. The word or expression may well defy literal translation and involve concepts that need a clear explanation. The learners can be asked to explain the term in their own language and to use the language in context to show how and when it might be used. To ensure comprehension, the student who has requested the explanation can then summarize in one or both languages to check full understanding.

Such ad hoc translation support may be added to by tasks specifically designed to bring out particular features of the language or culture. A number of such tasks have been developed for use in tandem courses. For example, "Words" involves simply providing tandem pairs with two lists of words, one in each language, and the task is to explain each word and what lies behind it. "Joy riding", for instance, defies a literal translation and describes quite a complex phenomenon. There is a similar task on fashionable abbreviations like DINKs ("dual income no kids").

One concern about translation is a common one in tandem learning, whether face-to-face or via e-mail: native-speaker partners may not always know the correct answer and may sometimes give inaccurate explanations. This is sometimes interpreted negatively by those responsible for the organization of the course. However, an important part of language and other learning is to seek verification of what you have heard and not to take anyone's word for it, particularly if the person providing the support is not a specialist.

In the above examples tandem learning by e-mail is an integral

part of a larger course. It is possible to envisage a translation course where texts for translation are selected by either the tutors or the students themselves and translations are produced in both languages by negotiation. The students could take newspaper articles, songs or any text type that they wished to concentrate on. Alternatively, as an exercise in creative writing, both partners could be required to write their own bilingual texts. A particular issue of this type of work is that it is difficult to assess the output of each partner if one does not have access to all the drafts and correspondence.

3.6 Conclusion

There are doubtless other types of e-mail tandem work that can be successfully integrated into courses. There has been no attempt here to prescribe its use, given the great variation in the circumstances in which students find themselves, the demands of their courses, and their needs as learners. The search is on to find ways of harnessing new technologies in the development of more effective (and less expensive) ways of supporting language learning. E-mail requires technical resources, new teaching styles and new ways of working. It has, however, been shown to have considerable potential both in its own right and as an additional resource.

4 Language and intercultural learning in the forum

by Norbert Hedderich

4.1 Purpose of the forums

Each subnet of the International E-Mail Tandem Network has an electronic discussion forum which is open to anyone who has Internet access and who would like to participate in bilingual discussions pertaining to the two languages and the countries involved. The overall purpose of a forum is to enable participants to improve their foreign language skills and to gain a better understanding of the culture of the target language country by reading the contributions to the forum and by posting messages themselves.

Bilingual electronic discussion forums have the unique advantage that they link native speakers from different cultures who are interested in improving their language skills and cross-cultural understanding. The forum is therefore a learning environment, an "electronic classroom", which by nature offers a number of advantages over the limitations of a conventional classroom. In the latter, it may be more difficult to argue effectively against cultural stereotyping, simply because no one from the other culture may be present. Even if the instructor is a native speaker of the target language, his or her counter argument to a cultural stereotype would perhaps not be as effective in this situation as counter arguments offered in the "electronic classroom" of the forum, where numerous representatives of the other culture can easily and quickly respond.

Participation in the forum is beneficial for various groups of learners. First of all, it addresses students who currently have an e-mail tandem partner and for whom the forum work will complement pair work. Secondly, students who are on a waiting list for an e-mail tandem partner can actively participate in the forum discussion and may find a tandem partner this way. Third, the forum allows teachers to find out what topics are important to the learners and to post information relevant to language and intercultural learning. Fourth, the participants need not be university students; anyone with access to the Internet may sign on to one of the forums and contribute. In the

German-English forum, for example, people from all walks of life have become members, and this has certainly helped to ensure a highly interesting discussion.

4.2 Types of postings in the forum

4.2.1 Introductions

Any newcomer to the forum should introduce him/herself to the group, providing some autobiographical information and stating personal interests, reasons for signing on to the forum, and suggesting possible discussion topics. Participants may write in either language, though we recommend that most of the introduction be written in the native language. The introduction is not a language exercise. It is a very personal statement, and may be important for future list activity. By writing in their native language, newcomers are also more likely to provide more information.

Introductions not only serve the purpose of making one's presence known to the entire list community, but are also written in hope of finding one-on-one e-mail tandem partners with similar hobbies and interests. Since introductions are an important aspect of forum activity, teachers should encourage their students to make their introductions as interesting and creative as possible. Preferably introductions should not merely list the person's major field of study and personal interests, but should go into some detail. This will increase the likelihood of responses from fellow forum members. A new forum member may state which topics he or she would like to discuss and may end the introductory letter with a question to the forum which will spark discussion.

4.2.2 Practical information postings

All forum members are encouraged to post relevant information as well as queries on any topic relating to the bilingual context. In the past, forum members have posted recipes, poems, song lyrics, jokes, summaries of news articles, etc. Many of these text-types have a unique cultural quality of their own. The forum is also a good place to post useful addresses and databases where participants can get further information. World Wide Web addresses are but one example in this category.

Often list members will post queries. These give real-life quality to the forum. For example, a Spanish student who has signed on to

the Spanish-English forum and who is planning a period of study in the United Kingdom may ask how she can get a driver's permit or what the climate is like in the region where she will be studying. Another common type of posting are language-related questions, especially translation questions. Often forum members ask about specific terminology that is not usually found in the dictionary, for example from the business or technical field. Their query might result in multiple responses from other members and often this leads to further discussion. They may also discover that there is no exact equivalent in the other language, simply because this particular concept does not exist in the other culture.

4.2.3 Discussion topics

Discussions on a variety of topics are the centrepiece of an active forum. Forum members are always encouraged to suggest topics for discussion. Generally speaking any topic is possible. Some suggestions will undoubtedly result in a heated debate, whereas others will not be picked up at all. Topics which lend themselves to cross-cultural comparisons and can clarify cultural stereotypes tend to work particularly well. Here are some examples of topics which have been discussed in the four-year history of the German-English forum: political correctness, recycling, dating, folklore, pop music, computers, German and American beers, what people do in their free time. Inevitably, discussions bring together participants with similar interests. They can provide an important first step in intercultural learning, by communicating factual information about the other country. On a higher level of cross-cultural learning, topics which explore behaviour, attitudes and values rather than mere factual information tend to spark the most discussion. "Is it true that in country X people do ...?" works particularly well as an opener for a discussion. In general, the forum coordinators have found that discussion topics stated as a question generate more discussion than those that are not. Also, students who have studied and worked in the other country and have lived in the other culture as foreigners are in a particularly good position to contrast both cultures. Reports of their impressions generally generate comments from both sides.

4.2.4 Language learning tips

Improving writing ability in the target language is an ongoing process. Too often language learners are not given practical

advice on how to improve certain aspects of the language learning process, for example, how to learn vocabulary. The forum brings together native speakers and learners, teachers and students, and is an ideal place to pass on information of this nature.

First of all, the forum can be used for tips on how to learn more effectively in tandem. Although the e-mail tandem provides a unique opportunity for language and culture learning, problems may arise. For example, tandem partners may not know how to use their partnership to its fullest potential; or one partner may be uncertain how how to correct the other's work. Teachers can step in and help with many of these issues by posting tips on error correction, language use, topics, etc. at regular intervals.

Secondly, teachers can post at regular intervals a variety of language learning tips for developing target language skills. Especially in a high-traffic forum, participants may be faced with more quantities of difficult text than they can readily comprehend. Information on reading comprehension strategies such as skimming and scanning can help readers cope with the volume of texts. By pointing out to students that global comprehension should come before detailed comprehension, the reading process may be facilitated.

Teacher-generated language learning tips may also provide information on the development of productive skills. As a bi-weekly feature of a forum, teachers could post tips on commonly occurring lexical and grammatical problems. As the discussion about a particular topic gets into full swing, participating teachers or the subnet coordinator may provide some key vocabulary which will aid forum members in the comprehension of texts as well as in writing their own postings. Learners therefore can have two sources of feedback: comments from their native-speaker tandem partner and more general language learning tips provided by trained teachers. Whereas the former will come in the form of solicited correction of the texts sent to the partner, the latter will focus on a wide range of lexical, grammatical and stylistic tips in broader context.

Students themselves should also be encouraged to post tips for language learning in the forum. They could pass on insights gained from corresponding with their tandem partner, language learning tips they have picked up in the classroom, or what they did to maximize the linguistic benefit of a period of study abroad.

4.3 Student participation in the forum

Forum members quickly realize that the forum belongs to them; they feel a sense of ownership. Forum activity often takes on a dynamic of its own, and it is up to the members themselves to keep the forum interesting. The forum is designed for but also created by language learners. Generally speaking, forum coordinators do not interfere in the discussion. Exceptions are if the discussion becomes monolingual rather than bilingual, or if the discussion dies down. The "quality" of the discussion in a forum therefore very much depends on the members themselves. While "lurking" in the forum has some benefits, teachers should encourage their students to participate actively.

The Internet is a new medium and many forum participants are on an electronic distribution list for the very first time. If all participants adhere to the basic rules of "nettiquette", the list stays manageable and frustrations will be avoided. Here are some of the most important ones: the subject line should always state the topic of the text. Many readers have to process large volumes of mail and this makes managing one's mailbox much easier. The subject line also indicates in which language the text is written. The reply function should only be used for messages which are intended for a wider audience. Responses to an individual forum member should be sent directly to the recipient, not to the entire list. This tends to be the most common problem, especially on high-traffic lists. While it is up to the subnet coordinators to periodically post reminders on "nettiquette", students often take matters into their own hands and post such reminders on the list, guide the discussion, thank participants for contributions, and bring discussions to a close.

Finally, everybody in the forum needs to be aware of the distinctive features of electronic communication. The easy response mechanism and the speed with which messages can be delivered is something all participants need to keep in mind. Students should be asked to avoid rash responses and too many one-line postings to the forum. In a heated debate, it is often better to let a response cool down overnight, before one sends it off.

As far as content is concerned, students can suggest any topic in which they are interested. Very often, "special interest groups" will form around a specific topic and will bring interesting discussions to the forum.

4.4 Teachers and the forum

Teachers who sign on to the forum can expect a variety of benefits. Like students, they can use it for exchanging information about the target culture. Teachers often have only limited opportunity to travel to the target country and be in face-to-face contact with native speakers of their target language. The forum enables them to address participants from the target country directly and to learn about their opinions.

Teachers may encourage their students to sign on to the forum. Forum activity on the part of the student becomes especially meaningful if teachers reward students for sending contributions to the list. A portfolio of letters and responses sent to the forum could be one possible optional project in a course. If all or most members of a class subscribe to a forum, the teacher could supplement and continue the forum discussion in the classroom.

4.5 Intercultural learning in the forum

The forum allows people who may be spread all over the globe to send messages to each other within minutes. This novel method of communicating has tremendous potential for intercultural learning, but forum participants also need to be aware of difficulties inherent in the nature of e-mail. While research into the nature of electronic communication is only in its infancy, there are some obvious differences between communication in the forum and face-to-face oral communication. First of all, it is asynchronous. In a face-to-face discussion, listeners can make an interjection to an unclear or potentially offensive statement which in turn can be directly rephrased and clarified. With e-mail, this is possible only in a separate mailing. Secondly, e-mail is an exchange of text without any of the non-verbal communication which in face-to-face encounters expresses approval, disapproval, surprise, etc. What are the implications of all this for effective forum work? Everybody should make an effort to express him/herself as clearly as possible and should make every effort to anticipate problems and misunderstandings, rather like a defensive driver.

The true benefits of intercultural learning in the forum come when people actively participate. Teachers should remind their students

repeatedly that if most people "lurk" on the list (only reading forum messages, not posting any messages) the forum will be quiet except for a few participants who will dominate the discussion. It takes initiative on the part of everybody to keep a forum interesting. A group spirit, and a sense of knowing each other help a great deal in keeping a forum lively. The more the "faceless" partners in the forum come alive through vivid descriptions and distinctive comments about themselves and their opinions, the more likely others will be to join in. Forums become active when people react to other people's comments.

The first years of experience with bilingual forums have shown the extent to which participants learn about each other and each other's countries from delving into cultural and especially culturally sensitive topics. Sometimes it is the highly provocative question or statement about the other culture, phrased aggressively, that leads to many sensible contributions from forum members. The intercultural learning effect may be even stronger than in a face-to-face conversation, because the reaction to one such culturally sensitive statement is often a larger number of responses.

5 How can you participate?

5.1 If you are a university student ...

If you are a university student and wish to learn a foreign language in tandem, you should take the following steps:

1. First of all, *select the subnet* you wish to participate in. This should be the subnet that pairs your native language with the language you are learning. The list of subnets is printed in section 6.

2. Then, *apply to the central Tandem Dating Agency*. You will receive an e-mail tandem partner by taking this step. Send a message specifying the subnet you want to participate in, your native language, and the language you are learning to the following e-mail address:

   tandem@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de

   A sample message would be: "ENG-FRA. My native language is English. I'm learning French. My name is ..." You can write this message in either language.

3. *Subscribe to the appropriate forum*, in which you can engage in group discussion of various topics in both subnet languages. Send the subscription message to the address:

   majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de[1]

   A sample message would be: "SUBSCRIBE ENG-FRA"

4. After your subscription has been processed, *introduce yourself in the forum*. Send a short letter about yourself, preferably in both languages, to the forum address:

   e.g. ENG-FRA@tandem.uni-trier.de

   or ENG-ITA@tandem.uni-trier.de[2]

5.2 If you are a teacher ...

If you are a university teacher and would like your students to work together in tandem with students of a colleague at a foreign

1 If you are subscribing to the English-German forum RIBO-L you need to subscribe at a different address, namely: listserv@uriacc.uri.edu (Message text: SUBSCRIBE RIBO-L first name last name).

2 The forum address for the English-German forum is: RIBO-L@uriacc.uri.edu

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university, then you need to contact the co-ordinators of the appropriate subnet.

Perhaps you would also like to subscribe to the local organizers' and subnet co-ordinators' forum, TANDEM-ORG. In this case, send the message "SUBSCRIBE TANDEM-ORG" to the address:

majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

5.3 To establish a new subnet ...

If you would like to establish a new subnet, please contact the network co-ordinator, Helmut Brammerts, e-mail:

brammerh@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de

A new subnet is generally established under the following conditions:

- At least two universities (one per target language country) are prepared to allow their students to participate in the subnet.
- At least two co-ordinators (one for each target language, if possible) are prepared to assume responsibility for the subnet.
- The co-ordinators of the other subnets and the responsible persons at the partner universities agree to the establishment of the new subnet.

6 Subnets and language pairs

You will always find an up-dated list of all existing subnets on the WWW servers of the International E-Mail Tandem Network:

http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/

or http://tandem.uni-trier.de/

This list is continually brought up to date.

At the publication deadline for this brochure (June 1996) the following subnets existed:

CAT-DEU (català-deutsch)
Co-ordinators:
Christian Röhl, Bochum (D) – roehlc@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Maribel Andreu, Barcelona (E) – ilfr7@cc.uab.es
Forum address: cat-deu@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

CAT-ENG (català-English) – under preparation
Co-ordinator:
Maribel Andreu, Barcelona (E) – ilfr7@cc.uab.es
Forum address: cat-eng@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

DAN-DEU (dansk-deutsch)
Co-ordinators:
Harald Pors, Århus (DK) – gerpors@hum.aau.dk
Helmut Brammerts, Bochum (D) – brammerh@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Forum address: dan-deu@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

DAN-NED (dansk-nederlands)
Co-ordinators:
Harald Pors, Århus (DK) – gerpors@hum.aau.dk
Marc De Kegel, Brussel (B) – marc@erasmus.eunet.be
Forum address: dan-ned@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

DEU-ENG see RIBO-L
The English-German subnet was established in 1992 between the universities of Rhode Island (**RI**) and Bochum (**BO**) – hence the name

RIBO-L which was maintained for historical reasons.

DEU-ESP (deutsch-español)
Co-ordinators:
Margarita Blanco Hölscher, Oviedo (E) – blanco@pinon.ccu.uniovi.es
Helmut Brammerts, Bochum (D) – brammerh@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Montse Menzinger, Bochum (D) – menzingm@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Forum address: deu-esp@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

DEU-FRA (deutsch-français)
Co-ordinators:
Veronika Bayer, Paris (F) – bayer@cal.enst.fr
Karin Kleppin, Bochum (D) – kleppink@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Beate Helbig, Bochum (D) – helbigb@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Kathrin Walti, Montréal (CANADA) – waltik@ere.umontreal.ca
Forum address: deu-fra@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

DEU-HAN (deutsch-hangul (Korean))
Co-ordinators:
Heike Berner, Bochum (D) – bernerh@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Minhaeng Lee, Seoul (KOREA) – leemh@bubble.yonsei.ac.kr
Forum address: deu-han@tandem.uni-trier.de
Subscription address: majordomo@tandem.uni-trier.de

DEU-HRV (deutsch-hrvatski (Croatian))
Co-ordinators:
Jelena Mihaljevic Djigunovic, Zagreb (HRV) – jmihalje@filozof.ffzg.hr
Snjezana Kordic, Bochum (D) – Snjezana.Kordic@rz.ruhr-uni-bochum.de
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Subscription message: subscribe ribo-l First Name Last Name

Further subnets are presently being established.

7 Hints for tandem partners: some examples

The following sub-sections are only examples. You will find more help for tandem partners in the forum of your subnet and on the WWW servers of the International E-Mail Tandem Network:

http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/

or http://tandem.uni-trier.de/

Just follow the links to your subnet.

7.1 The first letters

7.1.1 Hints from the Tandem "Dating Agency"

... when they have found you a partner.

International E-Mail Tandem Network
Tandem 'Dating Agency'

Hello,

You can find the address of your new tandem partner written above. Write each other a short message as quickly as possible („Hello, I've got your address. I'll write more on Monday. Best wishes, Ferdi"), so that you've already had contact with each other. Ideally write immediately, before you continue reading this message ...

If your partner doesn't answer ...
Should you not hear from your partner within the following week then write to us straight away and we'll look for a new one for you.

Exchanging partners ...
... is not something bad in tandem learning, in fact quite the opposite: you can learn new things from new partners. Just write to us whenever you want a new address.
Our address is: tandem@slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de

What's the best way to learn in tandem?
Lesley and James, the co-ordinators of the English-French subnet, have a few tips, just continue reading.

We'll now say goodbye, have fun.

Your Tandem Dating Agency team (Heike & Dawn)

7.1.2 Hints from the subnet co-ordinators

International E-Mail Tandem Network
English-French Subnet: ENG-FRA

Dear tandem participants,

We are Lesley and James, the co-ordinators of ENG-FRA. We are delighted that you both can now begin to work together in email-tandem.

Perhaps you are already experienced email-tandem learners, in this case we hope you have a lot of fun and wish you success.

If you're not, well, here are a few tips for you:

Where should we start?
Have you already sent the first short message to your partner to say hello so that s/he knows whether you want to participate or not? If so, then you can now write the first proper tandem message to each other.

Here's our suggestion:
To start off with, introduce yourself: tell him or her about your studies or your work and what you do in your spare time; perhaps you can tell him or her a bit about your house or your family. The important thing is that you write 75% of the first letter in your native language. And why?.. There are good reasons for this:

- Firstly, your partner wants to learn your native language from you, and following your good examples is the best way to do this. (And as your partner will have also written in his/her native language, you'll learn just as much from that.)
- Another reason is that as a foreign language learner you tend to say/write only what you are sure you can express correctly and avoid saying other things which you are unsure of. So if you want to be able to communicate more complicated things with the right vocabulary, then the initial information should be given in the native language.

The second letter
All the letters afterwards are different from the first one, as you can now respond to what your partner has written:

- you can ask questions, if there are things you don't understand – either to do with the language or with the content. You should of course answer his/her questions too.
- you can correct him or her when s/he has made mistakes – you can learn through the correction of mistakes too. But be careful: don't try and correct *everything*, that's expecting too much of you and your partner.

In any case it's always a good idea to carry on a topic in the language it was started in.

Further help for tandem work

You can also at any time ask advice from the other participants in our subnet by sending a message to the forum:

eng-fra@tandem.uni-trier.de

Or get in touch with us – the co-ordinators of ENG-FRA.

We hope you have fun and we wish you success in your tandem learning.

James Benenson, Département des Langues Vivantes, ENST Télécom Paris (F) – benenson@enst.fr

Lesley Walker, Modern Languages Teaching Centre, University of Sheffield (UK) – Lesley.Walker@sheffield.ac.uk

7.2 What can I write about with my partner?

by Jane Woodin

Don't forget, the only two rules of tandem are autonomy and reciprocity (mutual benefit). Following these, this means:

- You can write about what you want.
- You must bear in mind that you are writing to someone and so you need to make sure that your partner is interested in what you are writing.

Think about *what interests you*, for example:

- What do you like about being a student?
- What do you not like?
- What do you like to do when you are not studying?

- What sports are you interested in?
- What music do you like?
- What books/magazines do you like?

Think about *what you like to know about another person*. As well as the questions above, tell your partner about yourself:

- where you are from,
- your family situation,
- your home town,
- the life of a student.

Think about *why you are learning the language*. Tell your partner

- how long you have been learning their language,
- why you are learning it,
- what contact you have had with native speakers of the language,
- what interests you in particular about their language and culture,
- why you are part of the tandem network.;
- and ask why your partner is learning your language.

Tell your partners about any *interesting events in your country*:

- Tell them about your surroundings, what it is like where you live.

And *don't forget:*

- Ask your partners what they are interested in talking about.
- Ask them questions you want to know about them.
- Answer your partner's questions.
- Tell them what they are interested in knowing.

Good luck! Have fun!

7.3 How do I maintain a good relationship with my partner?

by Jane Woodin

Communicating via e-mail is difficult because you can't see your partner to judge their reaction. It is therefore particularly important

to take care to maintain a good relationship. It is up to you both to do this – no-one else can do it for you! Here are three suggestions:

- Keep your partner informed.
- Ask your partner for the information you need.
- Answer their questions.

Suggestions for discussion with your partner are:

- how often you would like to write,
- what you would like to write about,
- how you would like to be corrected (if at all),
- how long your letters will be,
- holiday times or exam times.

Don't forget to ask them what you want to know AND to answer their questions!

If you have any other ideas for maintaining a good relationship with your partner, let us know!

Good luck! Have fun!

7.4 Benefits of pairing partners sharing the same discipline

by Elke St John

A tandem partner is an expert in the language you would like to learn. However, tandem learning offers you even more possibilities if your tandem partner shares the same discipline as you. Here are some examples:

- Two law students can compare and evaluate the different laws/statutes in two countries.
- Two lawyers can write about the format and terminology of contracts in their respective countries.
- Ideas and experimental protocols can be exchanged between two scientists.
- Medical students can confer about the latest techniques and practices in their countries.
- Mechanical engineers can discuss different kinds of concepts

and production techniques relevant to their industry.

- Tunnel projects can be discussed by civil engineers.

As you can see, there are no limits and there are lots of possibilities. If you write in your mother tongue, your partner can learn a lot from it. Not just the specific terminology will be exchanged, but also the format, e.g. contracts and specific expressions and phrases in the subject concerned. Obviously you will also learn from that what your partner writes.

Have fun!

7.5 How can tandem partners improve their language skills?

by Helmut Brammerts

English translation by Dawn D'Atri

Tandem learning is more than a regular pen friendship. It is a learning partnership. You will of course discuss topics which are of interest to you both. You'll quickly find out yourselves which these are. However, we should occasionally discuss ways you can do this so that you learn as much as possible. And we should profit from the experiences that we have all had until now. So how can you improve your language skills with the help of your tandem partner?

There are three separate areas:

- **Learning from the partner's modelling**
  You can learn how one expresses oneself in the foreign language from what your partner writes. (For this reason, you should both write at least half of your letter in your mother tongue!)
- **Learning through your partner's help in formulating**
  Your partner can always help you to say what you want to say in the foreign language (which is his/her native language). All you have to do is ask him/her.
- **Learning through your partner's corrections**
  Your partner can correct what you have written in the foreign language (his/her native language). You just need to come to an agreement about how such corrections should be made.

Here are some examples:

7.5.1 Formulate a difficult paragraph

If one assumes that one can learn new things a) from the partner's modelling, b) through the partner's help in formulating, and c) through the partner's corrections, then this example particularly applies to area b).

Introductory comment

I am certain that you have often had the experience of wanting to say something in the foreign language but not having the necessary means to do so. Often the result is that you either avoid saying what you want to say or only say as much as you can. In both cases you don't learn very much and possibly lower the quality of your discussion.

In tandem it is easy to avoid this problem since your partner understands your native language at least to a certain degree! And he wants to learn it better.

Concrete idea

Write you partner a long text in your native language (!) about a topic that interests you both: for example, your weekend or the last party you went to, your problems with friends or parents – whatever you like.

When you are finished, select a paragraph from your text which is difficult for you and then try to express the content of this paragraph in the foreign language. It doesn't need to be an exact translation, but all important ideas should be maintained in your version. And, most importantly, when you don't know how to say something, don't waste time trying to figure it out, but rather leave it blank or write the equivalent in your native language. Then ask your partner to write the paragraph in his/her native language.

Final comment

By the way, although your partner is helping you in this example, s/he is learning a great deal, too: s/he has to read and understand your whole text. And s/he has to carefully analyse and translate at least one paragraph – a very good exercise.

7.5.2 Correct ten mistakes at the most

If one assumes that one can learn something new a) from the partner's modelling, b) through the partner's help in formulating, and c) through the partner's corrections, then this example particularly applies to area c).

Introductory comment

Of course we want to learn from our mistakes, which is why we would like our partner to correct us.

However, it has almost certainly happened to you that you received a letter from your partner and didn't know how and where to start correcting, there were so many mistakes and the text was so awkward. Maybe you then spent hours marking and correcting all the mistakes..

Or vice-versa: You received a letter from your partner with so many corrections that you didn't even recognize your original text. How discouraging! And you knew that it must have cost him or her a lot of time.

In both cases the problem lies in the fact that you or your partner tried to correct everything. But it's usually not our goal in tandem learning to find all mistakes or to produce a perfect text. You should "just" be helping your partner to learn, and his or her receptivity is limited!

So don't try and correct everything, but rather make choices. You definitely don't want to put too much pressure on yourself or your partner.

Concrete suggestion

It is easiest,

- if you only correct a certain number of mistakes (e.g. ten at the most) and
- if you only correct the most important mistakes (e.g. only the ones that you intuitively feel you can't let slide by).

In practice, it might look like this:

1. When you answer your partner's letter, you can have your e-mail program insert your partner's letter in your text. In general, the beginning of each inserted line of text then begins with this symbol: >.
2. Then read your partner's text and insert an empty line after each line that contains a mistake.
3. When you have inserted empty lines in more than ten spots, delete all except ten!
4. In each empty line, write the correct form or a commentary, for example, "I don't understand – do you mean ... or ...?"

Of course, you can decide on a different number of mistakes to correct. But more than ten is usually too many: too much work for the person who is doing the correcting and too much for the person who is supposed to be learning from the corrections. And in the next letter there will be more mistakes ...

Final Comment

One more tip: so that the corrections don't cover up or burden your regular communication, we recommend keeping them separate (either in a separate message or at the end of the regular letter).

There are many more opportunities for tandem partners to help each other through corrections. We have some more ideas, but no doubt you do too. So go ahead and write them to the forum!

7.6 How to improve writing skills in e-mail tandem learning

by Annette Gaßdorf

English translation by David Little

At the Hogeschool Katholieke Leergangen Sittard, Netherlands, we have used e-mail tandem learning as a means of helping our students to improve their writing skills in German. We have successfully used all the suggestions that follow:

1. Guidelines for developing a writing strategy.
2. How can I use the texts my tandem partner writes in his/her mother tongue to benefit my language learning?
3. How do we get on the track of individual writing problems? John Lalande's "error protocoll".

7.6.1 Developing your writing technique[1]

Writing in a foreign language is a highly complex process. Repeatedly one has to find answers, more or less consciously, to the

1 The following reflections are based in part on an approach to writing developed by Bernd Kast for use in teaching German to beginners. But it is also worth reminding advanced learners of the principles of the approach. (Kast, B., 1989: "Vom Wort zum Satz zum Text. Methodisch-didaktische überlegungen zur Schreibfertigkeit", *Fremdsprache Deutsch. Zeitschrift für die Praxis des Deutschunterrichts.* Schreiben. pp.9ff.)

following questions: What message do I want to communicate? How should I construct my text? Is the order that I would use in a text in my mother tongue also appropriate in the foreign culture? What does the reader already know about the topic? What do I need to explain to him? Do I have enough vocabulary? Is my spelling correct? Do I know all the necessary grammatical rules? What linguistic register can/should I select? The brain must be firing on all cylinders. It must control many processes simultaneously, including the motor process of writing by hand. Even professionals writing in their mother tongue can easily feel that the task is too difficult. This implies that we should break the writing process down into a series of individual steps.

A set of procedures

1. Let your thoughts play. Write down as many key words as you can think of that have to do with the topic you want to write about. At this stage your motto should be: "Anything goes." After all, you can always cross out things that you adon't need at a later stage. Make sure that you leave plenty of space between your keywords.
2. Now consider how you can add content to each of your key words – what? where? when? why? background information, opinions, and so on. Write down this extra content beside each key word. Perhaps you already have plenty to write about. Perhaps you even have too much?
3. Put your key words in order, for example by numbering them. What information must I give my foreign reader, and in what order, to get my message across? Which key words belong together thematically? Which aspects should I put at the beginning, or at the end, to emphasize their importance for me or for the topic? – But consider too which aspects you can or would like to delete: you don't want to write an encyclopaedia!
4. Now make very simple sentences out of your key words and the content you added to them. To begin with you'll find that difficult. Why? In your mother tongue you have learnt how to formulate complex sentences straight off. In a foreign language we automatically try to follow the style we are capable of in our mother tongue. What is more, we often continue to think in our mother tongue – and then try to translate our thoughts into the foreign language. In this way we can easily create monster sen-

tences in the foreign language which the reader sometimes won't be able to understand at all – or which drive our e-mail tandem partner to distraction because he doesn't know where he should start to correct us.

5. So allow yourself the luxury of starting with simple sentences. You can fashion them into a coherent text in a further step. For example, if you are learning German you can link sentences with connectors like *obwohl* ("although"), *also* ("now"), *weil* ("because"), etc.; and you can consider whether a passive sentence might not be better in the active. If you are learning French you can take your time to reflect where you need to use the subjunctive; and if you are learning English, you can consider where particular idioms are appropriate. At this stage you may also change the order of your ideas: a good text must always be worked over and revised. That seems to be a lot of work, but it's worth it: you make the job easier by concentrating on individual aspects of the writing process, and you make fewer mistakes. What is more, if you consciously follow this process, you will find that you gradually become quicker.

The path that I have suggested here is not one that you will necessarily want to follow in every respect. It is a model. We all have our own problems in writing, and we must discover them for ourselves. Your tandem partner can help you in this. Ask him what strikes him as positive and what negative in your foreign language texts. Identify those parts of your text that seem to you specially suspect and ask your partner how he would formulate them in his mother tongue. And make a check list of your errors (I shall return to that idea later).

7.6.2 Your tandem partner's mother tongue text as a "quarry"

An advantage in tandem learning is that your partner is always an expert in your target language. You should exploit that not only for correction but also to enlarge your own expressive capacity. Treat the target language part of your partner's letter as a linguistic quarry. Look for

- words and expressions (for example, word combinations like *eine Entscheidung treffen*) that you don't know;
- words, expressions and grammatical structures that you know passively but are uncertain about using;

- words, expressions and grammatical structures that you think you could use in your texts;
- idiomatic expressions.

Here is a German example. There are, of course, many other "stones" to be "quarried" here besides the ones I have marked.

> Lieber Hans,
>
> zuerst danken wir Dir herzlich für Deinen Brief und das Buch über Österreich. Wir haben uns unheimlich darüber gefreut, denn das war eine schöne Erinnerung an unsere Ferien.
>
> Wie Du vielleicht schon weißt, wollen wir am 12.7.1996 unseren "50." Geburtstag feiern. Wieso 50 wirst Du fragen! Klar, Lise und ich sind beide in diesem Frühjahr 25 geworden, d.h. also, daß wir zusammen 50 Jahre alt sind. Das ist doch wirklich ein Anlaß zum Feiern!
>
> Es soll ein großes Fest werden, denn wir wollen auch genau 50 Leute einladen. Hiermit laden wir Dich und Luise also ganz feierlich ein, zu unserer großen Sause zu kommen.
>
> Wir starten am 12.7. mittags um 12.00 Uhr auf der großen Wiese im Aachener Stadtwald mit einem Picknick. (Nein, es regnet nicht!!!) Dann könnt Ihr bei unserer großen Stadtrallye Aachen kennenlernen. Und abends treffen wir uns bei meinen Eltern im Garten: "open end".
>
> Natürlich könnt Ihr bei uns übernachten. Es wäre aber gut, wenn Ihr Eure Schlafsäcke mitbringen würdet.
>
> Wir freuen uns sehr auf das Fest und besonders auf Euch. Schreibt uns bitte bald, ob Ihr kommen könnt und wann Ihr ankommt, damit Euch jemand am Bahnhof abholen kann.
>
> Viele liebe Grüße
>
> Lise und Hans

What can I get out of this letter as a learner of German?

I have chosen some expressions and structures from this letter that I can use when I want to write an invitation to a party:

1. *danken für*
   Wir danken Euch für Eure Einladung.
2. *sich freuen über*

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Er hat sich wahnsinnig über Euren Besuch gefreut.

3. *Erinnerung an (sich erinnern an)*
   Ich erinnere mich gern an die letzten Ferien.
4. *... 50 Jahre alt*
   Er ist jetzt 60 Jahre alt, oder: Er ist jetzt 60.
5. *ein Anlaß zu*
   Das ist ein Anlaß zur Vezweiflung.
6. *einladen zu*
   Sie hat mich zu ihrer Hochzeit eingeladen.
7. *eine große Sause = ein großes Fest* (umgangssprachlich!)
8. *Stadtrallye* = ein Spiel, bei dem man eine Stadt kennenlernt, indem man bei einem Spaziergang durch die Stadt verschiedene Aufgaben lösen muß.
9. *Es wäre gut, wenn Ihr ... mitbringen würdet.*
   Warum hier Konjunktiv II? Höfliche Anfrage!
10. *sich freuen auf*
    Ich freue mich unheimlich auf das nächste Wochenende.
    Unterschied zu "sich freuen *über*": "sich freuen *auf*" wird auf die Zukunft bezogen gebraucht.

7.6.3 The "error protocol"

To begin with it is difficult to decide for onself which errors one's partner should correct. A convincing solution to this problem has been suggested by John Lalande.[1] Draw a grid with (say) ten vertical columns, each one referring to a different text. The vertical columns are divided horizontally to accommodate different error. I have listed below the error classification that we use in Sittard in our courses for future teachers of German.[2] Other systems are, of course, possible and can be negotiated between learners and their lecturers. It is possible that your target language sets linguistic traps of a quite

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1 Lalande, J. F., 1989: "Die Rolle des Schreibens im Unterricht Deutsch als Fremdsprache. Neue Entwicklungen in den USA." In M. Heid (ed.), *Die Rolle des Schreibens im Unterricht Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, pp.103ff. München: Iudicium.

2 We have adapted John Lalande's "Essay Correction Code (ECCO)" to the needs of Dutch-speaking learners of German. It is worth noting that our students added the Symbol *Ü* ("überflüßiger Fehler").

different kind; or perhaps our "error protocol" is too detailed for your purposes, but in that case you can adapt it.

GrK	=	Kasusfehler (*error of case*)
GrG	=	Genusfehler (*error of gender*)
T	=	Tempusfehler (*error of tense*)
H	=	falsches Hilfsverb oder Modalverb (*wrong auxiliary or modal verb*)
St	=	falsche Wortstellung (*wrong word order*)
V	=	falsche Konjugation des Verbs (*wrong conjugation of the verb*)
SV	=	falsche Stammform des Verbs (*wrong stem form of the verb*)
W	=	falsches Wort (*wrong word*)
A	=	falscher Ausdruck (*wrong expression*)
Prap.	=	falsche Präposition (*wrong preposition*)
Ref.	=	Reflexivpronomen fehlt (*reflexive pronoun missing*)
R	=	falsche Rechtschreibung (*wrong spelling*)
X	=	hier fehlt ein Wort (*word missing*)
Bez.	=	Bezug: falscher Konnektorengebrauch oder falsches Pronomen (*wrong use of connector or wrong pronoun*)
Z	=	Zeichenfehler: Komma fehlt oder steht falsch, ? fehlt etc. (*error in punctuation: comma missing or in the wrong position, question mark missing, etc.*)
U	=	Welche Fehler hätte ich vermeiden können? (*what errors could I have avoided?*)

You can use the grid to categorize the errors you have made in your own texts, and then you can answer questions like

- What kinds of errors did you make most frequently in your first three texts?
- What errors could you have avoided?
- What errors *must* your e-mail tandem partner correct?

By using such an "error protocol" you can determine where your problems lie. Get your e-mail tandem partner to help you use this "error protocol" to draw up a list of your habitual errors. Make a

note of the most important ones, which may be semantic, grammatical, syntactic or intercultural. Now when you compose new texts in your target language, check them against your personal list of errors. The more often you consciously avoid errors, or your e-mail tandem partner consciously corrects them, the more rarely you will make them.

Good luck!

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